

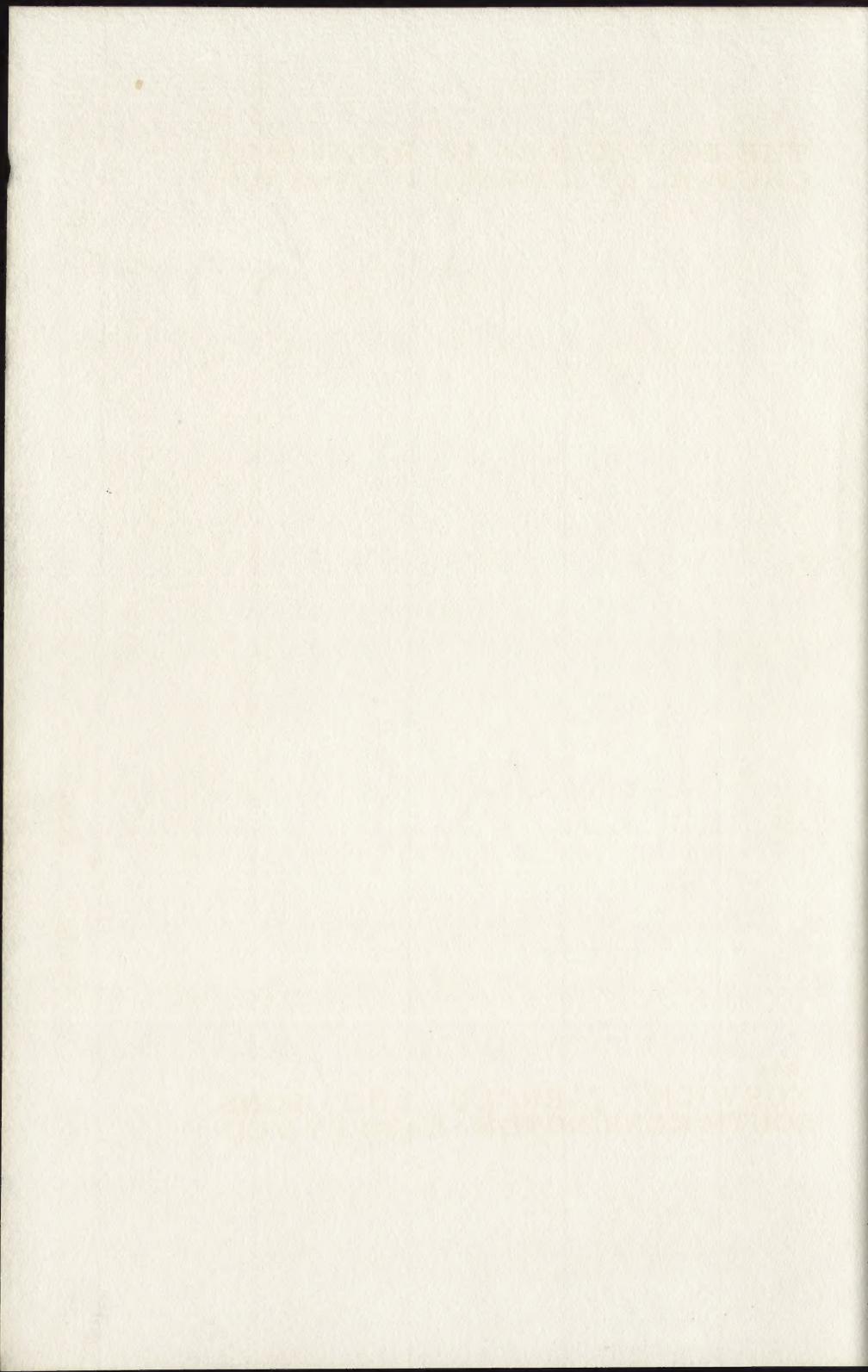
THE ROOD-SCREEN OF RANWORTH  
CHURCH. BY EDWARD F. STRANGE

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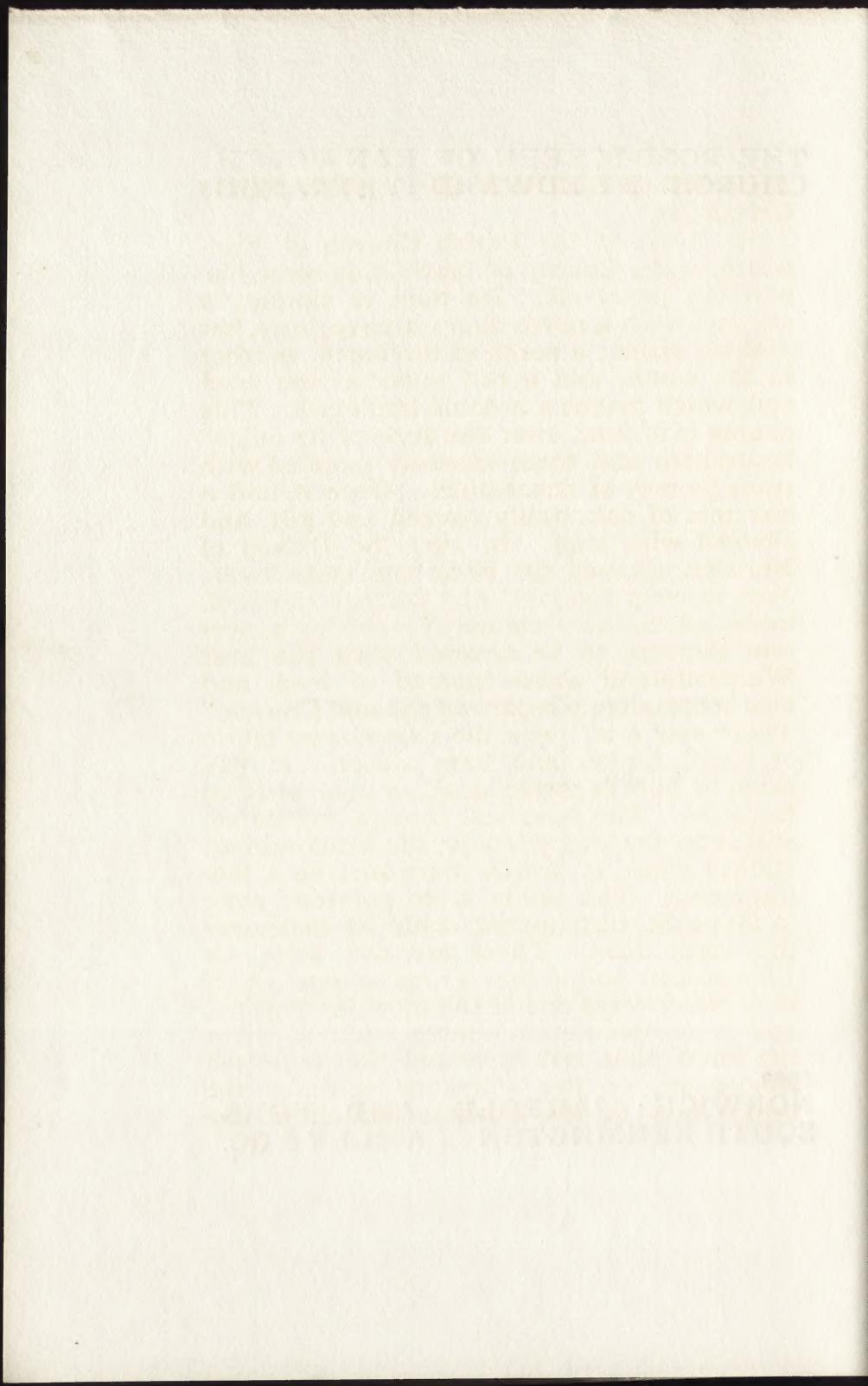




THE ROOD-SCREEN OF RANWORTH  
CHURCH. BY EDWARD F. STRANGE

1902

NORWICH: JARROLD AND SONS  
SOUTH KENSINGTON: LAMLEY & CO.



## THE ROOD SCREEN OF RANWORTH CHURCH.

THE fabric of the Parish Church of Ranworth, in the County of Norfolk, is some five hundred years old. Its plan is simple; a chancel, with a north door; a nave, lofty, but without aisles; a porch to the north, another to the south, and a tall tower at the west end, which makes a notable landmark. This church is of flint, after the style of its neighbours, here and there sparsely paneled with stone by way of decoration. Once it had a fine roof of oak, richly carved and gilt, and covered with lead. In 1811 the Bishop of Norwich allowed the vicar and churchwardens to strip the lead and destroy the roof, under a specious pretence of "putting a new roof thereon, to be covered with the best Westmoreland slates instead of lead, and also of completely repairing the said Church." This "new roof" was the commonest fabric of rough timber and bare slates. It has decayed and departed now, so may well be forgotten. The benches, though mutilated, still show the poppy-heads; the windows had stained glass, of which there survive a few fragments. The walls were painted: even in 1814 a St. Christopher could be seen over the south door. There are five bells, an Elizabethan pulpit, and a rood screen which is in many ways one of the most interesting, and in its decoration almost without doubt the finest that has survived the legalised iconoclasm of the sixteenth century, the brutal ruin of the Puritan faction in the

seventeenth, and the still more fatal neglect and apathy of the two hundred years that followed the Restoration.

The screen extends across the whole breadth of the edifice, which has no aisles, in conformity with the general, but by no means universal, plan of Norfolk churches. There are, however, extensions to the north and south walls of the nave fulfilling the functions, not of screens, but of retables to two side altars, the body of masonry of which still remains in its original position, while the altar-stones themselves are said to be incorporated in the flooring of the church. The screen upheld an unusually wide and sumptuous loft, projecting mainly westwards and supported by rich groining consisting of one complete range of arches and the spring of another. Of this, the inward half only of the first range is still in existence, the remainder, which must have hung downwards and been terminated with carved cusps at the point of junction of the ribs, having disappeared. Additional strength was given to this erection by two elaborate buttresses projecting westward in a line with the chancel walls. At the top of these can still be seen the cutting of the timbers, into which the construction just described was introduced.

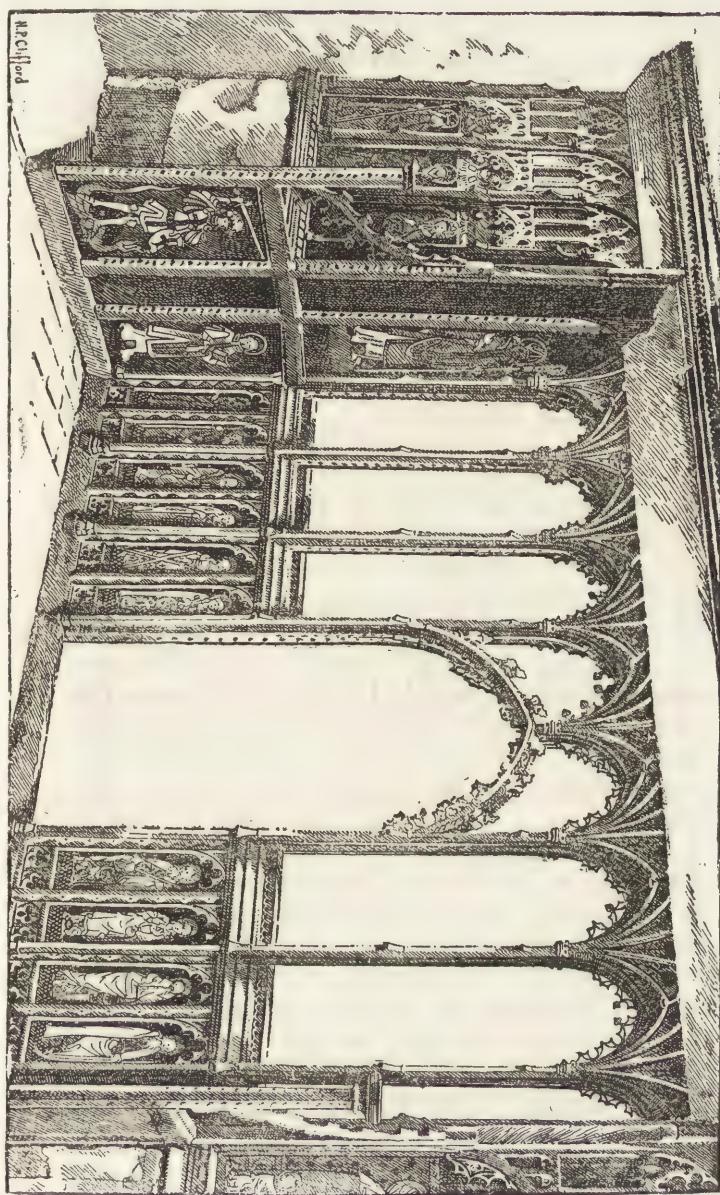
These buttresses are each formed by two tall shafts (both extending upwards to the loft), from the inner of which the second range of vaulting sprung; and one, octagonal in section, of about half their height. The

upper portion of the latter is free, and terminates in a flat-headed capital which might either have supported large candles used in connection with the service of the Rood; or, more probably, have borne carved wooden figures, easily removable, like the lions which still remain on similar columns on either side of the rood screen gate at East Ruston. Each of these pairs of shafts is braced to the main structure by a transverse beam, and the two upper and three lower panels thus formed are filled in with board. From the junction of this with the outer shaft springs an ogee-shaped rib, ornamented above and below with crockets, and rising with a graceful curve to join the middle shaft; the outer edge of which, on either side, has been mutilated as if by the demolition of some carved figure.

This very rare architectural feature is one of the chief points of interest of the screen. It is a splendid example of the way in which a necessary detail of construction can be made beautiful by a decorative treatment which never loses sight of the utilitarian purpose inspiring it. And the completeness and success of the scheme will be realised when it is remembered that, not only had the loft to be strongly supported, but the two altars in the nave to be provided with screens on their inward sides, in order to give them that definition and half seclusion which their ritual use demanded.

The screen itself has eight bays; of these, two in the middle are occupied by the door-

way, and their central shaft rests upon its arch, which is adorned with six carved leaves of great beauty. This arch, and each of the eight others, has also a double row of carved openwork, now much broken, but once of considerable delicacy. Instances of similar treatment occur also at Southwold, Ludham, and East Ruston (the latter being also exactly similar in construction); and this method of decoration constitutes a notable departure from the more ordinary use of window tracery as at Cawston, Acle, Walcott, South Aylsham, and other churches in the neighbourhood. Below the transverse beam, each bay is divided into two compartments containing painted panels, with trefoil shaped arches and resting on two quatrefoils. The wings of the screen lie against the return of the nave walls, and are only continued in the upper stage, above the side altars. Each is divided into four bays, the upper part of which has late Perpendicular window tracery, and the lower, painted panels. The shafts throughout the screen are buttressed, those of the centre portion having some additional moulding. Access to the rood loft was gained by a stair, opening below, in the north wall; and above, in the east wall of the nave. Just above the second bay of the south retable is a small bracket in the wall. In the drawing by W. P. Nichols (1860) this is occupied by a statue, apparently of the Blessed Virgin, but it is doubtful whether the artist actually saw it there. The same sketch shows the



arch at the top of the rood staircase to have then been surmounted by mouldings.

Beginning on the north, the first panel has the figure of Saint Etheldreda, crowned as became the daughter of a King of East Anglia, but also with robe and crosier as first Abbess of Ely. The second figure was for a long while deemed to be that of St. John the Baptist, in spite of the evidently female head, an attribution resting on the emblems and on what was thought to be the garment of camel's hair under the cloak. It has also been called St. Agnes. There is little doubt, however, that we have here one of the rare representations in England of St. Mary of Egypt; and that she is shown covered from head to foot in the hair that shielded her during her repentance in the desert, as well as with the cloak brought by the angels. The next figure appears to have been left unfinished; it has been suggested that this was because it was obscured by a tabernacle or some such appurtenance of the altar. I cannot, however, admit the force of this argument. Supposing, which would be very unusual in a small parish church, that more than one tabernacle existed, it would be placed in the centre instead of at the side, and would obscure part of each of the centre panels. This figure has also been called St. John the Baptist. But, though some marks suggest a beard, a close examination shows the head to be that of a female, bound in a close linen head-dress: and it is more likely that we should find it to be



St. Agnes, who is also represented with this emblem. We should then have the two retables devoted entirely to female saints. The fourth figure is unmistakably that of St. Barbara, with tower and palm. On her robe will be noticed the first of the patterns derived from field sports which are so remarkable; a dog with a collar of bells and a bird, which may be a peacock. The outer sides of the parcloses screens are bare. On the inner side of that on the north we first come to one of the two finest paintings of the whole series, a magnificently arranged St. George. He is represented on foot, clad in complete and sumptuous plate armour, with surcoat, and shield bearing the Red Cross. In his right hand he brandishes a great sword, wherewith he is about to strike the dragon, already vanquished and cowering beneath his feet. His helmet, the curious ear-pieces of which will be noticed, is covered with a turban surmounted by three jewelled plumes. His cloak falls in graceful lappels about his shoulders. The whole composition is magnificent, and as a piece of decorative painting is probably unsurpassed by anything of its kind in England, except that of St. Michael, which faces it. For the latter is the masterpiece of whoever painted the screen. The archangel, also, is armed with sword, cuirass, and shield. On his head is a rich crown, and around his shoulders a jewelled cloak. The shield, of fantastic shape, has a pointed boss of gold, and thereon is the badge that he also bears on his breast,

a cross flory. His wings of crimson tell out against the background of dark green, studded with golden flowers. Beneath his feet is the dragon; seven-headed and wounded already to death.

These two panels of Saints Michael and George, the patrons of our empire, are among the greatest works of the art of their period remaining in this country—and we have come near to letting the church that holds them fall and bury them in its ruins!

The inner sides of the parcloses screens hold panels painted with four other Saints, two on either side. The lower figures, in each case, are pretty certain: St. Stephen (the patron of weavers) with book and napkin containing stones, vested as a deacon, on the north; and St. Lawrence (patron of taverners) in similar robes, with a gridiron, on the south. But the figures over these cannot be named with confidence. That on the north—a Bishop with Pastoral Staff and Vestments—is called St. Felix; its companion on the south, an Archbishop fully vested with cross and pall, St. Thomas of Canterbury. These attributions are quite conjectural. One would expect to find in this position the Four Fathers of the Church: or, since there is no doubt about the two saints in the lower panels, Saints Erasmus and Nicholas in the two upper; for lights were maintained in the church in honour of each of these; and the situation would be a probable one. It may be worth while to remember, in favour of the latter suggestion,

the great popularity of Saint Nicholas with the common people, and that book, pall, and cross-staff might well be found in a representation of him, as well as the richly-jewelled gloves and general splendour of vestment, which are somewhat characteristic. If they are indeed two of the Fathers (Saints Ambrose and Augustine), the other two, Saints Gregory and Jerome, might have been painted on the panels of the screen gate.

The central panels of the screen are devoted to the twelve Apostles, which occur in the following order, with their names as spelled in the Gothic characters accompanying each:—*Sancte symon* (emblem—a fish); *Sancte thoma* (spear); *bartholomee sancte* (knife and book); *Sancte iacobe* (St. James the greater, pilgrim's staff and book); *Sancte Andea* (cross and pouch at his girdle); *petre* (keys and book). On the south of the doorway:—*Sce paule* (sword and book); *Sce Iohes* (chalice and dragon); *Sce philippe* (basket of loaves); *Sce Iacobe* (St. James the Less, fuller's club); *Sce Jude* (boat); *Sce Matthee* (sword).

Each of these is represented standing on a tiled floor and richly clothed; the principal garment under the cloak being in every case of brocade, having a pattern of great beauty.

The south retable, like the north, is of four panels, on which are figured:—(1) St. Mary Salome, mother of the Apostles James and John. St. James, kneeling, holds a shell in his right hand, and with the left

gives a pear to his brother, who is seated on his mother's knee, and in his left hand holds a flying bird; (2) the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Holy Child; (3) St. Mary Cleophas with her four sons: St. Jude, holding a boat, seated on her knee; St. Simon, with a fish, standing at her side; St. James the Less, blowing bubbles; and St. Joses, with a toy windmill—such as one sees in the hands of Dürer's child-angels—playing at her feet. The last panel is devoted to St. Margaret, crowned, holding a book in her right hand, while with the left she thrusts a cross staff into the mouth of a dragon.

Each of the eight figures on the retables is represented as seated—an additional argument against the attribution of either, by the way, to St. John the Baptist, whom one would not expect to find in that position. Behind each is a dossal cloth, alternately green and red, fringed and diapered with a stencilled floral pattern, upheld by the half-length figure of a crowned angel, of exquisite grace and beauty, also seen against a diapered background.

The east side of the screen is decorated with conventional flowers, somewhat coarsely stencilled, and in no way to be compared with the rest of the painting. In this respect we find a third point of resemblance to the screen at East Ruston, on which precisely similar work occurs.

Before concluding this detailed account of the screen, attention must be called to the beauty of the incidental painting which

decorates the beams, frames, mouldings, and groining of the loft. Among the flowers, in spite of the conventionality of their treatment, one recognises forms that may well be derived from some of those growing in the marshland hard by—the ragged robin, forget-me-not, yellow iris, and marsh buttercup, for instance. And the diaper patterns on the robes of the saints also call for more than a passing reference. These patterns are in principle akin to those found in all pictorial art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from the shores of the Mediterranean upwards. But several among them have a characteristic of some considerable importance. The St. Barbara has a dog with collar of bells, and a bird; St. Simon, a chained dog; St. James the Great, a dog chasing ducks; St. Peter, a hawk striking a leveret, with a sporting dog also; St. Paul, an unmistakable spaniel with a bell on its collar attacking a duck; and St. Mary Salome, a hawk tearing the eyes of a hare. These details convey a distinct suggestion of locality. Ranworth had a duck decoy from time immemorial—and the dog is of the kind used for this purpose. All the hunting scenes introduced into these patterns are suggestive of English art; but those of which waterfowl are the subjects, point closely to a local origin, and a power of adaptation of design on the part of the artist, such as one would expect from the draughtsman of the St. Michael, the St. George, and the Angels.

Two of the panels on the north side of the

chancel entrance have small apertures cut skew-wise, so as to bear on the centre of the altar. These are squints, for the benefit of communicants, whose place at the administration of the Communion was without the screen. In the chancel is a small oaken lectern, in form a double desk supported by one moulded shaft.

On it is painted the following versicle, with its setting of old music:—

“Gloria tibi domine  
qui natus es de virgine  
cum patre sancto spiritu  
in sepi't'na secula.—Amen.”

It also has a painted eagle with a scroll bearing the words: “In principio erat verbum.” This desk has given rise to a great deal of speculation—but the explanation of its use is very simple. Rood lofts were furnished always with one or two light and easily-handled lecterns; and this was the one devoted especially to the Gospel. For, saith Durandus: “Also the Gospel is read from an Eagle, according to that saying, ‘He



came flying upon the wings of the wind.' " But in a small church it would be put to other purposes; and so, for the convenience of the singers, during the Octave of Christmas and certain other festivals, this—the final verse of the old hymn, "Jesu Redemptor Omnium," which was then sung at the termination of all the hymns at the different canonical hours—was painted up on the desk to save turning again and again to the choir-book. This chant was never used in connection with the Mass.

The cresting which now faces the nave, on the upper part of the loft, was probably put there in obedience to the order of the third year of Queen Elizabeth.

At the back of the screen, facing the altar, are six oaken stalls, three on either side: a not uncommon arrangement in monastic churches, of which several examples still exist in the neighbourhood. These were set up after the erection of the rood screen, part of the decoration of which they obscure. They are of the usual pattern of "miserere" seats; and a series in the choir of Norwich Cathedral is so like them as to suggest that they both came from the same source. One is inclined to speculate as to the probability of the whole set being part of the wreckage of St. Benet's Abbey; for there is no evidence of any college of monks having been settled at Ranworth.

The question now arises as to who painted the screen. Unfortunately there is no direct evidence. The churchwardens' accounts

have not been preserved; and such records as are still in existence relating to the history of the county during the period are strangely—to our ideas—silent on the point. But when one realises the social conditions under which the painter of the fifteenth century worked, this anonymity ceases to be unaccountable, however disappointing to our craving for personalities. The artist of those days was but one among the crowd of skilled artisans plying their various crafts. He had no special distinction beyond that appertaining to the standing of his guild; which might or might not in various localities be superior to those of the masons, the weavers, the goldsmiths. His calling gave him no social rank. His temperament did not matter. No one dreamed of writing his biography. He was just a workman whose reputation depended on his own skill, and whose opportunities of displaying the same were limited entirely by the demand in the place where he lived, or those to which in the days of his wander-years he might travel. In Germany and the Netherlands the guilds of painters were powerful corporations. They found lavish support in the painting of altarpieces, votive pictures for the great churches, and portraits for the great nobles and rich citizens. Records of their work are thus to be traced among municipal and ecclesiastical documents and the rolls of their guilds: so far as commissions, and the payment therefor, go. Out of these it has been possible to reconstitute some fragments of their life-

history, and to make a few definite attributions of paintings which have furnished material, by process of comparison, to enlarge the list of each man's work. In England, the guilds of artisans had not the same importance or the same patronage as abroad; a difference which at once explains the meagreness of fact relating to them. But, in their degree, the conditions were probably pretty much the same; and it is absolutely necessary in considering this class of work to remove from one's mind every idea of the individual importance of the artist, as we now regard it.

These paintings, then, were done by artisans; but of what nationality? Until a few years ago, it was the common habit to attribute them to Flemings; but, in the minds of one or two critics of this generation, the possibility has been present that they might, after all, be of English workmanship. The attribution to Netherlandish painters was an obvious plausibility, especially in view of the tendency which obtained for so long, to give our own country credit for producing nothing good in the arts. The close connection of East Anglia with the Low Countries in commerce, the certain fact that many skilled workmen therefrom settled in Norfolk and Suffolk, both upheld the theory. Its supporters were archæologists of repute, and so gained general acceptance for their views. But the trend of modern research has proved that English craftsmanship at the time was by no means so inferior

and so negligable a quantity as was inferred by these hasty conclusions. On the contrary, it certainly had a considerable repute in France, for instance, so much so as to call for protests from the French workmen, who found their wares surpassed by English importations; and it is not unreasonable to conclude that what was the case with one craft also held with another. And when the question is examined more closely it will be seen that there are substantial reasons for doubting, if not even absolutely rejecting, the old and unpatriotic notions.

In the first place, the screens themselves are peculiarly English in arrangement and detail. Their carvings and mouldings are in accord with the recognised architectural styles prevailing in this country. These mouldings rule the general plan and composition of the paintings, which are made on panels forming part of the essential construction of the screens, and not inserted as pictures are in a frame. This shows that the paintings were, at all events, executed on the spot, and not imported ready-made—a small point perhaps, but of importance to begin with. Then, as to the character of the decoration. At Ranworth, and generally throughout the Eastern Counties, it consists of figures of saints, each placed in a compartment, the ground of which is spotted with a diaper of conventional floral ornament. The treatment is broad, and as a rule simple, though unusually rich in the particular instance under consideration; but,

above all, invariably decorative and not pictorial. They are often enriched with gilded gesso ornamentation in low relief; and their frames are painted with flowers, treated conventionally, and with a strong family likeness in the different examples. Now there are some scores of paintings of this type still existing in East Anglia. If they had been the work of men from the Netherlands or Germany who came over for the purpose, one would expect to find even a greater number remaining in those countries. Allowing for the waste and destruction caused by war and religious change, some should remain. But there is nothing.

When one leaves the decoration of the screen as a whole, and turns to the consideration of the painted figures alone, the question becomes one of comparison of styles. After careful research among the painted and engraved work of the period, both German and Netherlandish, I have been unable to find any similarity of artistic treatment in either, with the exception described below. The nearest approach to it is in the Suabian School, which provides several examples of single figures of saints placed in panels with a diapered background. But the hard aspect of the faces and the stiff angular disposition of the bodies and drapery is quite different to the English work—for so one may venture to call it. In the great exhibition of mediæval Flemish art at Bruges in 1902 there was nothing to



remind one of the East Anglian screen paintings. The difference in the treatment of the faces in the latter as compared with those of the other schools, is akin to that found in carved ivories, which were also formerly ascribed universally to foreign artists. The English type is milder, altogether less harsh and stern than the others, and has not so much character as the foreign examples.

As far as documents go, there are many records of paintings executed by men of unmistakeable English names, during the whole of the fifteenth century; but none of these can be proved to have worked at Ranworth. Still, this fact alone of the known employment of Englishmen is of enormous importance: it puts the burden of proof that the screen paintings were of foreign work, absolutely on the shoulders of those who advance this theory. All the probabilities were against it—and especially the jealousy of the stranger displayed so keenly at the time. Granting that some influences were received from abroad during the fifteenth century, that does not imply that the whole art was derived therefrom. Flemish art towards the end of that period savours more than a little of the Italian schools, for instance. And there were plenty of English painters in Norwich before the Van Eycks had even invented—or rather perfected—their method in 1415.

Arguments have also been based on the textile patterns displayed in the robes of the saints. But these are found throughout Europe in the paintings of all the recognised separate schools other than those of Italy. Of course, the textiles themselves had this wide distribution, and the artists copied the imported treasures of their churches and palaces. But herein we find something on our side: the substitution—as pointed out above—of local hunting subjects for the lions and flowers of the South Italian designers.

We conclude, therefore, that the work is not only English but local. It was done by an artist of great skill. He had the power of imparting an unusual decorative quality to themes which were almost certainly part of his traditional equipment. He invented practically nothing—not even the St. George, the St. Michael, and the Angels. Beautiful as his touch has made them—probably far beyond the measure of their originals—it is equally almost certain that those originals existed, and that they were German—not Flemish. There is in the Tower a suit of armour which belonged to Henry VIII., and is believed to have been given to him by the Emperor Maximilian I. in 1509 as a wedding present. It is engraved with scenes from the lives of St. George and St. Barbara (the figures, it is worth remembering, come next to each other at Ranworth). On the breast-plate is the fight with the dragon: the same armour, the same pose, the right hand wielding the same type of sword at the same angle; the left foot treading on the dragon in the same place. The Ranworth painter has given his hero a cloak, a turban with three plumes, and a shield such as are also found in some of the early German woodcuts. He made the lines of the armour below the waist into a sumptuous girdle, and the chain-mail into a cloth; but the likeness cannot be denied. There is a similar German quality in the structure—so to speak—of the St. Michael and the Angels: though I have not been able to find anything quite so closely akin to them

as the instance above-named. One can only conclude that both the armour-engraver and the Ranworth painter worked from a common model—some print or set of prints by a German, which came into their hands.

This coincidence brings us to the question of the date of the paintings. The fact just mentioned—the lateness of the ornament, of the armour, of the screen itself, which is of the same class as the dated example at Ludham (1493), all show that it must be placed at the very end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century. Its subsidiary ornament is similar in character to that of Tacolneston, which I have shown elsewhere to be necessarily later than 1509, the date of the engraving by Lucas Van Leyden, copied on one of its two painted panels. On the whole I am disposed to put it between these two dates with a leaning toward the latter. And the screens of Southwold and Tunstead are, if not by the same hand, close copies of the Ranworth work.

We do not know who made the screen, nor who was the donor, as at Aylsham and Ludham this is known. The Holdiche family held the manor during the period when it must have been made, and one of them—Thomas, died 1579—is buried in the chapel of Our Lady on the south side of the nave. Later on they were benefactors to the church, and gave at least one of the bells; but beyond an unauthenticated tradition that attributes the gift to an earlier member of the family there is nothing. Other benefactions may have

some significance. Thus, Robert Iryng in his will (1479) says, “\*Itm volo qd quid pann’ pendent’ cora’ altar’ sce marie in eadm’ ecclia’ erit pictat’ de bonis meis p’prijs.” Roger Iryng (1484) endows the “Light of Blessed Mary” for seven years after his death, in the same way as he had maintained it while living, as well as leaving forty shillings—a considerable sum—for the purchase of two candlesticks to stand before the altar of St. Ellen in the chancel of Randewurth; and five marks to buy a pair of tunicles. And, above all, Robert Milward (1507) after bequests to the High Altar, the Lights of “owre lady,” “seynt Elyn,” the “perk lyte,” the “lyte of owre lady of pety,” the “lyte of seynt . . . and seynt John baptyst,” gives money for the repair of the church, for “an honest pryst to prey for my soule in the chirch of Ranworth and for my ffryndes soules . . .”; half an acre of land also to the High Altar; and then, “It I wyll yat my goods pay for the poynting of seynt Elyn’s tabernacul. And to have it well done.” This may refer only to the tabernacle of the High Altar. But it shows that painting, and good painting withal, was in the minds of the parishioners at the date to which I have ascribed the screen.

In this place it may be worthy to note that Ranworth formerly possessed a fine font-cover of painted wood, and an old drawing thereof, dated 1705, is preserved in the chancel. It was of a type not uncommon in the county, and in no way related to the screen, and was

the gift of Thomas Archer and Agnes his wife in 1505; one more example of the munificence of that generation.

A word is needed on the origin and uses of such a screen as that of Ranworth. The enclosure of the choir has been a custom of the Church from the earliest times; and this by open screens. Another custom was the singing of the Epistle and Gospel from two stone pulpits placed at the west end of the choir; and the rood screen, as we have it, is a natural development from these beginnings, hastened by the obvious symbolism which soon attached itself to the arrangement: by the monastic tendency to seclusion, by considerations of comfort and convenience, and, above all, by the feeling of reverence for the place wherein the Mass was celebrated.

Throughout England those of the parish churches belong almost entirely to the fifteenth century; and the enormous number erected and decorated during that period would alone have developed local schools of artists of no mean importance.

Its form will have been made plain by the description here given. Above it, on the *perk*—a beam stretching across the chancel arch—stood the Great Rood itself, generally of wood, richly painted and gilt. On either side were the Blessed Virgin and Saint John; below, the loft was furnished with lecterns for the singing of the Epistle and the Gospel, and with coronels and standards for lights. The state with which the old ceremonial was carried out is well shown by Durandus.

Says he, "The Benediction having been bestowed, the Deacon proceedeth along the south side of the Choir to the Rood Loft, and before him goeth the Sub-Deacon with the Volume of the Gospel, and before him the incense-bearer with incense; and before him in some churches the Banner of the Cross; and thus they ascend the Rood Loft. And the Deacon readeth the Gospel: the which being finished, they return to the Priest or Bishop together."

The rood loft was also used for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at great festivals, and for the reading of certain lessons. In Lent its paintings were veiled, and some staples in the screen at Ranworth may have been used for this purpose. As we have seen, a special light was maintained here—the perk light; in other churches even an altar was sometimes established.

So far I have tried to give a true account of the screen and of its surroundings as they are and as they were. But I would be greatly at fault if I did not write one word on the spirit of the age which had the making and the keeping of it. For an age it was that saw parish life and work at its best and noblest. The church then meant something more than it generally does now. It was then the centre of the life of the place, toward which all that was good in the deeds of the villagers inevitably turned. The earlier influence of the monasteries had given way to that of the parish priest; and under his guidance and that of a faith for the time

accepted without doubt or question, the folk held together and fared well. To the church went all men as to a common home. Craftsmen and traders met there on the feasts of their patron and at other stated times; going bravely in due order with banner and ensigns. Other guilds there were, banded together for the sake of fellowship and the glory of the saints. These cared for the upkeep of the altars, the lights, the ornaments, the clergy. At Ranworth itself we know of three: dedicated to St. Helen, the patroness of the church, the Holy Trinity, and St. John the Baptist. The lights maintained were vowed to the Blessed Virgin, St. Anne, Our Lady of Pity, St. Helen (the High Altar), St. Erasmus, St. Nicholas, St. John the Baptist, and those of the Holy Cross, the light before the Rood, the perke light, and the light of the Cross on the perke—which latter four may be different terms for two only, or even one. To all these, from 1456 to 1532, are gifts, by will, of pounds of wax and the like; not from nobles, but from the prosperous citizens of the place: those who built the screen.

It was this widespread love for the church and pride in its well being that brought out all the best of the craftsmanship of the time. What skill a man had he gave proudly to its service. He was well paid: that was the kindly office of his fellows whose gifts came freely for the good cause. Not that there were painters and imagers in every parish: but when one of these came to work in his own place, it is good to think of the heart that

he would put into his toil. More than a dream, it may be, to find a reason such as this for the surpassing beauty of the Ranworth screen among its neighbours: to say that this work was wrought by one who knew well the marshland that his own church overlooked from its little hill; and so put into his masterpiece its flowers and birds as a sign of his love.

It is hard for us to realise how great was the beauty of the church within, in those days. The screen, glorious with new colour and gold, upholding the great rood; the mystery of the chancel with its stalls of oak; the priest dimly seen in vestment of fine needlework; the windows filled with pale quarries of painted glass, and here and there the splendour of a saint in crimson and blue; the roof upheld by carved angels; the walls with the story of Christopher, and of the Day of Judgment; of all these only fragments or memories remain—the wreckage of an ancient art and a still more ancient faith.

This book has been made in the hope that it will help to preserve the church from ruin. A new roof, windows, porch, floor, and furniture have been found needful; first for the sake of the decency of worship, and, secondly, to keep as safe as may be, this grand relic of our forefathers. In something of their spirit the work has been shared by rich and poor throughout the neighbourhood, and much has been done. But other help must be sought, for the task is too great for a small and poor parish. If English art is worthy of

a tithe of the attention given to that of foreigners, it will not long be lacking.



Written by Edward Fairbrother Strange,  
and the drawings made by Harry P. Clifford,  
for the Fund for the Preservation of the  
Church, to which all the gains will go.  
October, 1902.

THE REPAIR  
OF  
RANWORTH CHURCH,

CARRIED OUT UNDER THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF

Mr. J. T. MICKLETHWAITE, F.S.A.



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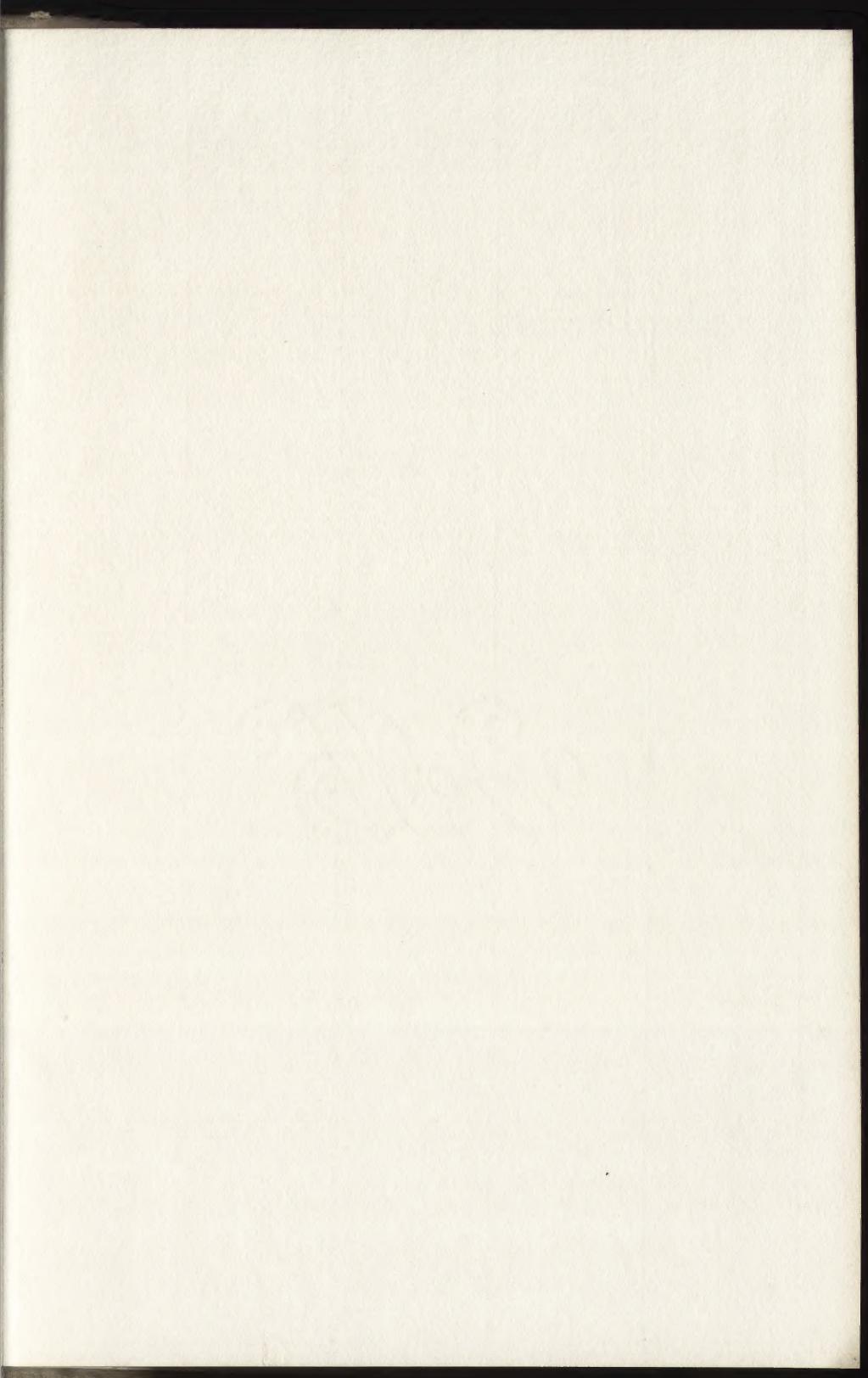
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November, 1902.





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